



United Kingdom Mission
to the United Nations
New York

One Dag Hammarskjöld Plaza
(885 Second Avenue)
New York, NY 10017

Mailing Address:
PO Box 5238
New York, NY 10150-5238

Telephone: (212) 745-9200
Fax: (212) 745-9316

E-mail: uk@un.int

Statement by the UK Government
at the 52nd Session
on the
Commission on the Status of Women

28 February 2008

Statement by the UK Government

52nd Session on the Commission on the Status of Women

Mr. Chairperson,

The UK aligns itself with the statement made earlier this week by Slovenia on behalf of the European Union. We would like to make some additional comments focussing on our national priorities.

But first of all, the UK Government would like to welcome this important dialogue on Financing for Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women.

Equality between men and women is a basic conditionality for a just, peaceful and prosperous society. It is also well known that investing in women and girls has a multiplier effect on productivity, efficiency and sustained economic growth. Addressing gender inequality needs a twin track approach.

First, laws and policy measures must be put into place to mainstream gender into all areas of life. Secondly, specific measures are needed to support the empowerment of women.

Government action also needs to be balanced by an additional third track - an active women's movement to support women and hold governments to account.

All of these areas need to be resourced, so that commitments on gender equality made at UN and national levels are finally turned into reality for women on the ground. That is why this year's CSW theme of Financing Gender Equality is so relevant to us all.

Women in the UK have made remarkable progress in the last century. One hundred years ago women in the UK could not vote, could not receive a university degree and had very limited legal rights. Despite radical improvements in women's status, however, there remains a persistent pay gap between women and men, women still shoulder the majority of caring responsibilities for children and elderly relatives, and violence against women remains a fact of life for women in UK, as it is for women everywhere.

The UK Ministers for Women therefore have focused their domestic policy priorities on these areas. As we have heard today, in all societies - rights, power and resources, are still unequally distributed between women and men.

Gender responsive budgeting is an important tool for analysing the impact of resource flows and policies for women responsive budgeting, and I am pleased to say that we will be working with women's NGO's in the UK to improve gender analysis of tax and spending policies over the forthcoming year.

Gender responsive budgeting is however only one part of the package. Tackling gender inequality also needs a range of complementary measures to set standards, monitor progress and enforce compliance with best practice. In the UK, we have put a range of such measures in place including: strategic target-setting for delivery of Government services, a Statutory Gender Duty, a review of discrimination legislation, measures to improve communication and collaboration between the key agencies and stakeholders for gender equality to improve impact and share best practice

All public bodies and public policies have a role to play in achieving the important political, economic and social goal of equality between women and men. Decision-making about how money is raised, through taxation measures, and how it is spent, on key public services such as health, including Sexual and Reproductive Health and Rights, housing, and transport for instance, can either widen or reduce the gap on equality for women and men within society.

Improvements in public transport, for instance, makes up just one out of 19 targets in the UK's cross-Government Public Service Agreement (PSA) on Gender Equality which seeks to stimulate improvements in those areas that successive Ministers for Women in the UK have identified as critical to improving gender equality.

More recently, the UK has built on this to develop a Public Service Agreement (PSA) on Equalities. Effective from April 2008, this cross-Government PSA seeks to address the disadvantage that individuals experience because of their gender, race, disability, age, sexual orientation, religion or belief. The Equalities Public Service Agreement has five key priorities including reducing the gender pay gap in the UK, and, increasing participation in public life by women, ethnic minorities, the disabled and young people. This should ensure the integration of gender equality into a coherent package of measures to reduce discrimination against all disadvantaged groups in the UK and thereby create a fairer and more equal society.

All of this is underpinned by the Gender Equality Duty, which came into force in April 2007. This Duty imposes a general requirement on public authorities, when carrying out their functions, to have due regard to the need to eliminate unlawful discrimination and harassment, and to promote equality of opportunity between men and women.

In order for the Duty to be effective, public bodies will be required to gender-disaggregate their data, which is also an essential component for successful gender budgeting. Public bodies are now responding to this new Duty which will be monitored and enforced by a newly established Equality and Human Rights Commission. We believe that these measures will have a positive impact upon the lives of ordinary women in the UK, and that in benefiting women they will also benefit children and men.

Mr. chair,

The elimination of gender inequality is also a key component of the UK Government's international development policy. Gender discrimination is not only unjust but is an impediment to sustainable economic development and achievement of the Millennium Development Goals. Without tackling the poor economic, social and political situation of women and girls which exists in many countries, we cannot hope to reach our developmental objectives.

The UK renewed its commitment to promoting gender equality and women's empowerment in our development assistance through the launch last year of a new Gender Equality Action Plan. This commits us to strengthening the focus and impact of development assistance on gender equality through both effective gender mainstreaming and support to targeted activities.

Our emphasis at country level is very much in supporting partners' own efforts including, where appropriate, in ensuring that national budgets and national development plans such as Poverty Reduction Strategies (PRSs) properly address the needs of women and girls. We will also continue our support to civil society partners, including women's organisations, who have an important role to play in promoting gender equality and women's rights and in challenging the discrimination that prevents women from achieving their potential.

We also need to get the international system and its resources working more effectively for gender equality.

Efforts to improve aid effectiveness, including the outcome of the High Level Meeting on Aid Effectiveness in Accra in September, need to reflect the importance of these issues and include incentives, accountability mechanisms and measures of results which track the impact on women's poverty and empowerment.

And multilateral institutions like the World Bank and the regional Development Banks need to play a stronger role in delivering better outcomes for women and girls.

Finally, the UK Government remains strongly committed to improving the performance of the UN system on gender equality and women's' empowerment. We are ready to engage in a discussion to explore the best way of reconfiguring the UN system so to support delivery at the country level, that is informed by international agreements and knowledge.

Thank you Mr. Chair.